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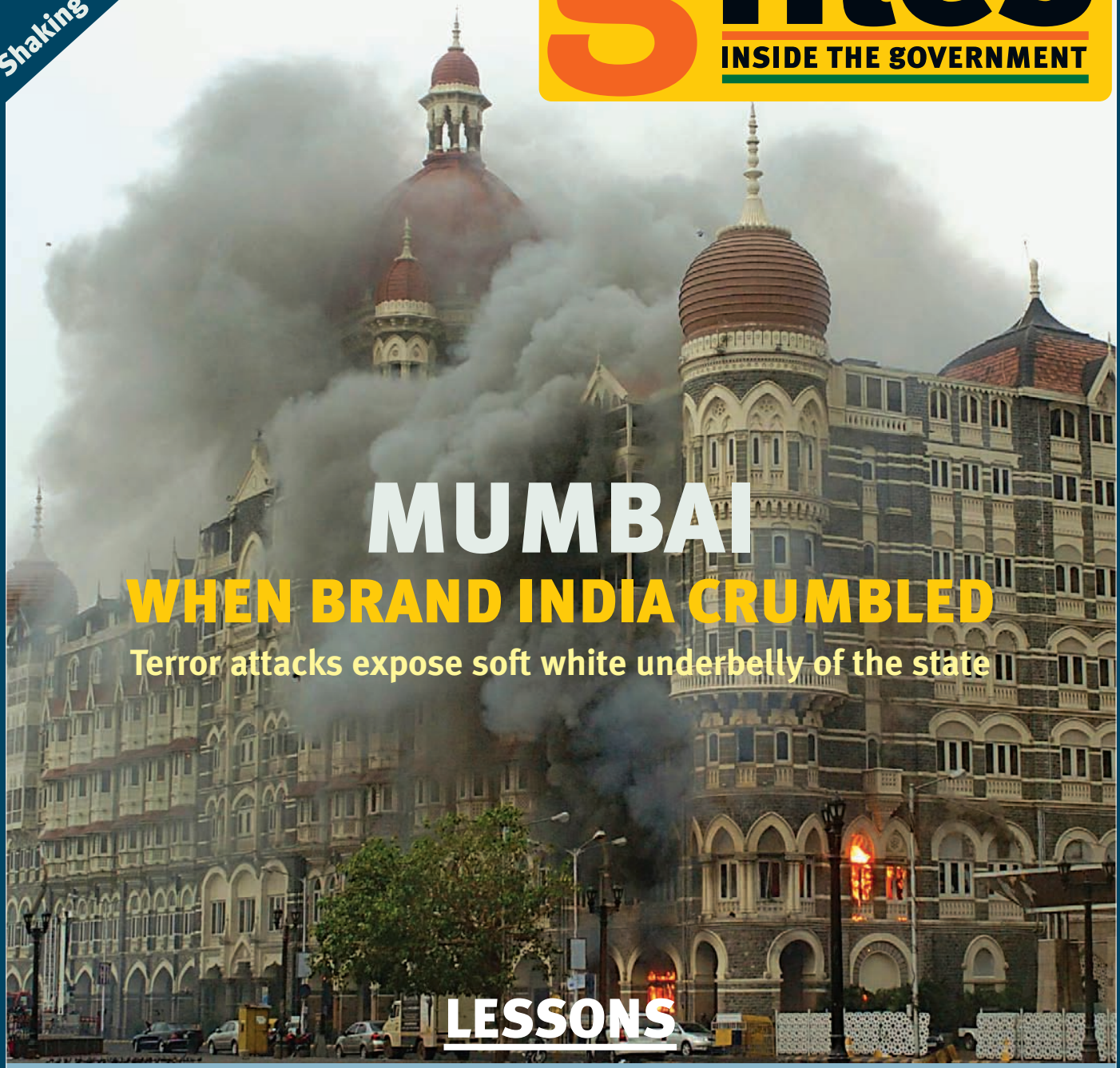
gfiles
INSIDE THE GOVERNMENT

Prabhat Kumar
Shaking up the bureaucracy



MUMBAI
WHEN BRAND INDIA CRUMBLED
Terror attacks expose soft white underbelly of the state

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- ILLUSIONS WERE SHATTERED
- SYSTEMIC FAILURES MULTIPLIED
- PATIL WAS AN EASY SCAPEGOAT

WHAT
- NSG REALLY NEEDS
- BABU HEGEMONY DOES TO MORALE

WHY
- BE WARY OF SHARING INTELLIGENCE
- A NEW SECURITY GRID IS PARAMOUNT
- COASTAL SECURITY WAS COMPROMISED

PLUS: OPEN LETTER TO PRANAB MUKHERJEE ON PAKISTAN

PHOTO: COURTESY THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

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gfiles
INSIDE THE GOVERNMENT

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From the Editor-in-Chief

A soft state is a soft target. This is the brutal, inescapable lesson of Mumbai. The point is not whether our soldiers and policemen and firemen battled selflessly against terrorists. They have always done so. But rather what it is within our system that makes us so vulnerable to repeated attacks from bomb-throwing, gun-wielding thugs and hoodlums. Arun Shourie was right on the money when he said, "For God's sake, don't keep running to Mummy." Those words should be etched in stone on the side of every government building in India. It is a powerful exhortation to Indians not to blame others or go running to superpowers whenever we are under attack. This behaviour is for sissies.

That India is a target and has been a target – for whatever geopolitical reason – has never been in doubt. But why is it such a soft target? Shourie's plea is that we look within and buffer and strengthen our resolves from within in such a way that any country or terrorist group will think a million times before sending a bunch of 20-something murderers to spray bullets and bomb public places.

This is also the voice emanating strongly from the special reports that tackle this issue in this month's *gfiles* – a nation hopelessly fractured and divided. No one has done this to us. We have done this to ourselves. Our highly politicized governance has played havoc with every institution in which a strong state should be reflected – police, military, security, bureaucracy. Our will to act forcefully and with determination has been emasculated by political convenience, corruption, venality, and putting self above service.

Only when two brothers quarrel can an enemy of the family enter your house. In India brothers are not only quarrelling but are at each other's throats, the family be damned. Outsiders see for themselves our inability to tackle a two-bit demagogue like Raj Thackeray when he wants to pull the idea of India apart. They watch with glee how we create our own Bhindranwales in Punjab, in Darjeeling, in the South, in our Northeast. How a band of Gurjjars seeking tribal status can block all access to Delhi within 12 hours. How the Amarnath shrine in Kashmir is turned into a vote-catching football that leaves Indian deaths in its trail. How politicians quietly back "liberation" movements in Assam and Mizoram. How parties in Tamil Nadu openly support the terrorist LTTE that assassinated Rajiv Gandhi. How those who run this are supported by and then protect criminals and accused murderers from arrest and prosecution. Governance is paralysed. The quintessential symptom of a soft state is paralysed governance.

If you were looking at India from outside, what would you see – a country that is riven with secessionist and fratricidal tendencies, promoted by the ruling elite for political and personal gain, in which the steel frame of governance, even though it knows what to do, is unable to do it because it has been stymied. Starting from the 10th Century, this is what foreign invaders and occupiers – Ghori, Ghazni, Abdali, the Dutch, Portuguese, French, British – perceived. And this is what India's enemies now see. A country ripe for the picking.

No amount of tinkering with the system, like making new laws or setting up a national intelligence agency, will stem the rot. The need is not for palliatives but for rebirth, rebuilding, and recreating a nation that must reflect the might and bravery of its ordinary people rather than the effete, self-serving and venal interests of its rulers.

INDERJIT BADHWAR

LETTERS: The November 2008 issue was superb, especially the excellent article by Tara Patkar on the higher bureaucracy in UP. PV Narasimha Rao, in his last book, quoted a letter from KK Nair, DM of Faizabad, addressing Bhagwan Sahai, Chief Secretary, as "My Dear Bhagwan Sahai".

About a decade ago, Yogendra Narain was Chief Secretary. Sitting with a former classmate in the camp office of the DM, I asked if I could make an STD call. My friend said it was ok so long as it was to a bureaucrat. I called the office of the Chief Secretary. He had gone home for lunch. I called his residence and Narain came on the line. I talked to him about his doctoral thesis on the Right to Information and also sought a personal favour. When I completed the 15-minute call, I saw the entire office was on its feet. My friend said he had never seen a DM discuss anything with the Chief Secretary. During telephone conversations, it was always the Chief Secretary pontificating while the DM would say "Yes, sir" intermittently.

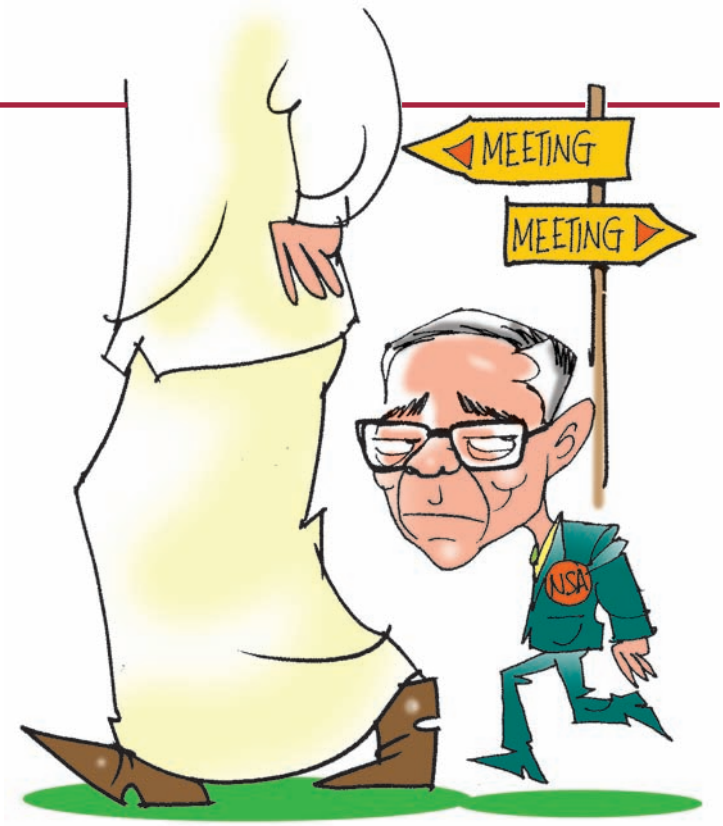
Anil Maheshwari, Senior Journalist, Shimla

PC gets tough
narayanan unhappy

HOME Minister P Chidambaram's first priority appears to be proving himself to be a tough task master in North Block and also emphasizing that he is different from his predecessor, Shivraj Patil. As a first step towards this, he has broken all previous records regarding the number of meetings of officers convened in the Ministry.

His day starts with a meeting of the head of every security and intelligence agency, along with National Security Adviser (NSA) MK Narayanan. This unusual move of asking the NSA to be present at the meeting has come as an embarrassment to Narayanan. Earlier, it was always Narayanan who called a meeting of all the security and intelligence agency chiefs and chaired it. Now he is forced to sit with them and be treated on a par with them.

Sources say even a personal request to the Prime Minister to bail him out from this embarrassing situation has failed to yield any result.



Woe is Siddiqui
up minister in hot water

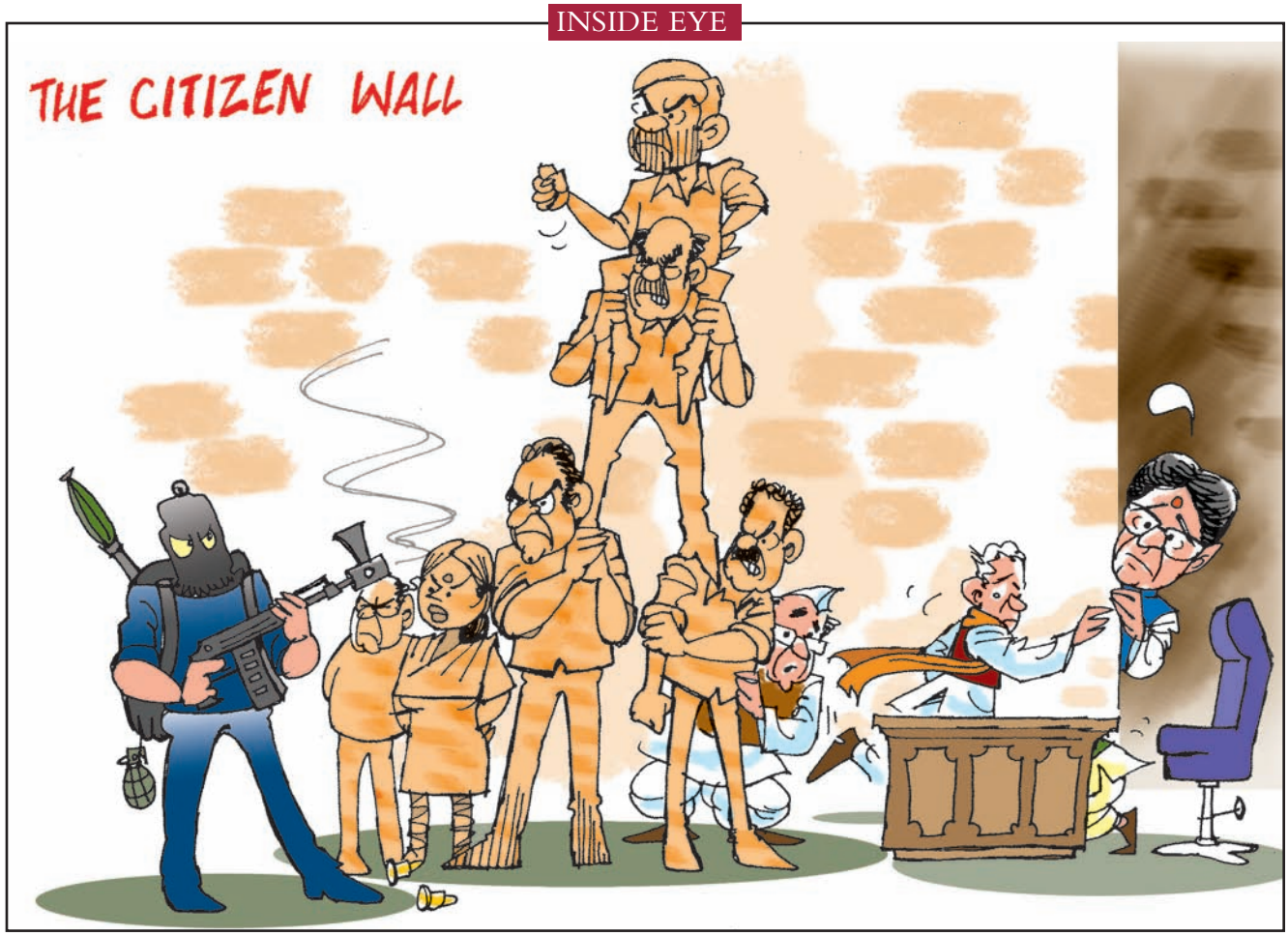
NASIMUDDIN Siddiqui, a powerful Minister in the UP government who is facing a CBI inquiry in the Taj corridor case, finds himself in quite a bit of trouble nowadays. Every time the CBI summons him for questioning, the Minister realizes afresh how little his power and status actually mean.

First, his aides and gunmen are not allowed to accompany him inside the CBI office. Next, he is made to wait until he is called inside. The wait can last from a few minutes to half-an-hour or more. Then, after he is called inside, he has to wait while a CBI officer examines the papers. Further, the officer calls the investigating officer who takes the Minister to his room and grills him. By the time the exercise is over, the Minister is a much humbled man.

Siddiqui is also facing the wrath of Chief Minister Mayawati over the BSP's poor performance in the Assembly election in Delhi, where he was in charge. Siddiqui is the seniormost Cabinet Minister and holds several important portfolios like PWD, irrigation, housing, excise and so on. Mayawati has decided to penalize him in her own style, sources say. Watch this space.

Unabated joy over Patil exit
lalu triumphant

THE series of bomb blasts in different parts of the country during the past year provided ample opportunity to some UPA leaders to question the



ILLUSTRATIONS: ARUNA

performance of then Home Minister Shivraj Patil. Lalu Prasad Yadav was one such leader who wanted Patil to go for personal and political reasons but without coming out openly against him.

After the Mumbai attack, when everyone trained their guns on the Home Ministry, Lalu openly demanded Patil's removal. He wanted the Prime Minister to immediately convene a Cabinet meeting and show Patil the door.

The PM did convene the meeting and a heated discussion ensued about Patil's fate. Mysteriously, Lalu remained silent. He did not utter a single word against Patil. Thereafter, immediately after Patil's removal, he could not hide his elation before the TV cameras.

A proactive Lalu knows that in case the UPA returns to power in the coming general election, Patil – who has ingratiated himself with the Congress President – is bound to occupy an important Ministry again.

Sharad Yadav's dilemma

once bitten, twice shy

THERE is no love lost between Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, a member of the NDA, and George Fernandes, former convener of the NDA and a veteran socialist. Now both Fernandes and Sharad Yadav, president of the Janata Dal (United), have been representing Bihar in the Lok Sabha or Rajya Sabha for many terms despite having roots in other states.

Nitish, a mass leader without whose help the duo cannot win an election in the state, does not like high-flying Delhi-based leaders and wants to run the show with the help of grass-root politicians. Now that he is being recognized as a development-oriented Chief Minister, Fernandes is attempting to checkmate him by making Sharad Yadav the NDA's working convener. But the latter knows that if he poses a problem for Nitish Kumar, he might not enter Parliament again from Bihar.

Lalu Prasad Yadav had kicked Sharad Yadav out of Bihar in the late 1980s for trying to remote control him. Hence Sharad Yadav is preferring to busy himself outside the state, wooing regional leaders like Chandrababu Naidu and Jayalalithaa. g

When Brand India

The immediacy of TV quickly shattered a host of illusions

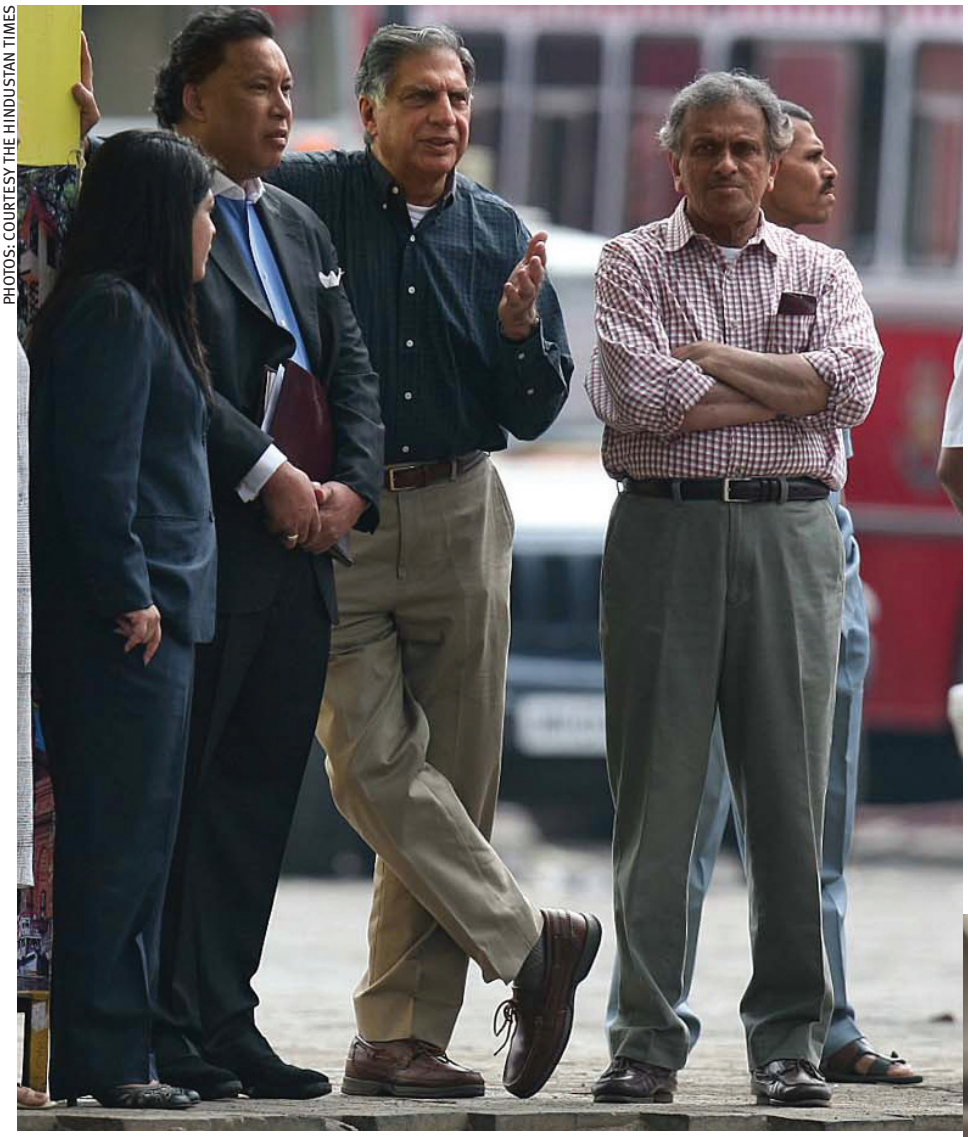
by S Narendra

DECEMBER 16. Not many among the present 60-crore young Indians may know that on this day the nation showed to the world its tough countenance for the first time in its independent history. The Indian Army accepted the surrender of a lakh of men from the Pakistani Army in Dhaka on this day in 1971. The impression this created within and outside India was one of military and political resoluteness. The outward message was: "Don't mess around with me." It was identified with the government and governance. People proudly rallied around this firm and purposive leadership. But this did not change the long-term image of the nation.

The image of India since 1991, on the other hand, with sustained surge in economic growth, was more wholesome and enduring, infecting vast sections of the population with a 'we can do it' spirit. The government advertising hoarding mounted soon after the abolition of the Industrial Regulation Act of 1956 that had constrained entrepreneurship in every sense aptly showed an elephant unshackled. Its message resonated within and outside, marking the emergence of a new India brand. The government had less to do with it.

Initially the new image was mostly created by the rising information technology industry, exhibiting both confidence and innovation. Suddenly global leadership in this field tilted in favour of India. Infosys, TCS, Wipro set new benchmarks in corporate governance and became islands of capitalism with a human face. A new breed of young Indians was getting very well rewarded for their educational attainments and this made education and merit highly valued commodities. IITs, IIMs and their products became icons of excellence and messengers of India's growing affluent society. India discovered that its population thus far looked upon as a burden was its untapped

PHOTOS: COURTESY THE HINDUSTAN TIMES



Ratan Tata (second from right) surveys carnage: never again; and (right) what world saw

The India Brand and its image is a composite of political leadership and dispersed, flourishing entrepreneurial prowess. It was this that was under attack

CRUMBLED

resource. Young Indian talent, educated and skilled, was another brand in demand.

The old economy industries grew out of their protected environment and took to innovation in a big way. Mahindra's Scorpio SUV, the indigenously developed Tata Indica and the announcement of the $2500 Nano, the scorching market for low-cost mobile phones wowed the world. Indian products and services and corporates with seemingly insatiable appetites for buying firms in the international market announced the arrival of Indian enterprise. Indian and global media serenaded the new India brand. They also showcased India's increasing soft power and its managerial talent. That a chaotic diverse democracy with marked ill-governance could accelerate growth, causing democratization of wealth and reducing poverty, added further lustre to the multi-faceted India Brand.

IT was this India Brand that was under attack in Mumbai. The bonus the attackers got was that they succeeded in catching the internal security system and political governance in total disarray and discredited it in the process. Overnight, not only the India Brand revolving around business and industry was shown to be not just vulnerable but somewhat fragile. Even the sweeping financial meltdown and global recession had not been able to do this. The India Brand and its image is a composite of political leadership and dispersed, flourishing entrepreneurial prowess. The 1971 image of powerful political leadership was short-lived because this was unaccompanied by economic clout. Similarly, the India Inc image turned illusory because it has to live with a soft state.

The instant flow of television images across the world from the night of 26/11 has woken us up to the reality that we are living in a soft state. The political leadership, instead of thanking and introspecting, has tended to blame the inconvenient messenger of this bad news. While it is true that the media, particularly TV, magnifies the image in focus, it cannot be accused of changing the law of physics that says image is a reflection of an object or reality. A soft state is defined as one that prefers expediency and continuously and routinely compromises its position in dealing with internal and external affairs.

The official diagnosis and solutions now presented have been heard long before. Even when and if the new anti-terror arrangements are put in place, will they be allowed to work? The past experience of the people reinforced the feeling that once the heat after the Mumbai tragedy dissipates, the system will lapse into its habitual lethargy. The current media campaign against the political class is a reflection of this gut feeling.

While this campaign is legitimate and required, if it is carried too far and the political class remains as insensitive as before, this could damage the core of the India Brand that is its federal democratic, political party-based polity.

Terrorism came to India through the Left wing and separatist movements and peaked during the Punjab problem in the 1980s and 1990s. The polity responded with one voice. Now, when faced with intensified foreign exported terrorism, the political system is proving wobbly and uncertain. This could shake the citizen's faith in the political arrangement. And the perpetrators of terrorist acts want nothing else. This is a warning to not just the political cliques but to the intelligentsia and the silent majority. The images of the Taj and Oberoi siege and the courage of ill-equipped RPF policemen taking on the terrorists at the CST need to be screened often to remind all of us of the consequences of our individual and collective apathy, that is the hallmark of a soft state. g

The Medium is the Message

Until recently the people's perception of weak governments was not reinforced by images. Now TV and Internet bring them closer home and multiply the exchange of such perception. Such images acquire more power when it is repeatedly seen that both the states and the Centre blunder in protecting one's limb and life.What were the TV images of a soft state we saw? In the first few minutes of the Mumbai siege, a very senior police officer getting killed because he entered the battle without battle gear, weapons, intelligence inputs and a plan; ill-clad and outgunned Railway Protection Force bravely taking on the terrorists at the CST; the inordinate delay in response from the Centre; the state government and its police, to whom the people entrust their daily security, displaying their ineptness and failing to perform the assigned sole function of crowd control when the commando operation was taking place; the blame game spectacle regarding the intelligence failure; the political leaders' search for scapegoats and making political capital.

OPEN LETTER TO PR

Dear External Affairs Minister,

The tentative actions announced by the Government of Pakistan regarding closure of a couple of terrorist camps and arrests of a couple of leaders of terrorist organizations in Pakistan has undoubtedly given some cheer to the Government of India and the MEA. But, we all know that Pakistan, in the past, has taken cosmetic measures while secretly helping the terrorist leaders and their camps to be renamed, re-located and eligible for ISI to continue their terrorist training aimed at India. I hope that, unlike in the past, the government will not sit on its laurels for getting Pakistan to take some cosmetic measures and will continue to apply sustained, strong and coercive pressure on Pakistan to give demonstrable evidence of action to destroy all terrorist camps.

While the government will hopefully maintain such pressure, it is perhaps the right time to review and discard several of the flawed assumptions and myths of the 20th Century on which our Pakistan policy is based.

MYTH NO. 1

A strong and stable Pakistan is essential to India's security and prosperity.

Reality: In the eight years of the 21st Century, Pakistan has deteriorated from a semi-stable country to a failing, if not failed, state. India, during the same period, has grown at an average rate of 8 per cent per annum, has been recognized as a responsible nuclear weapon power, is considered the second most important emerging power in the world and has developed a strong economic and military base. It is high time to discard myth No. 1 and to focus more on maintaining India's security and prosperity rather than worry about our neighbours.

MYTH NO. 2

Indian policy must aim at preserving and nurturing democracy in Pakistan and support democratic leaders.

Reality: Stable democracy in Pakistan is an oxymoron. No country can create support for sustained democracy in another country, least of all in Pakistan. Moreover, in the less than half-a-dozen bouts of democracy in Pakistan, there has been no Pakistani policy either on Kashmir or of destabilizing India which has been different from that of Pakistani dictatorship. Regardless of democracy or dictatorship in Pakistan, our focus should be preservation of security and national interests of the people of India.

MYTH NO. 3

Pakistan is a friendly country, with friendly people, and the best way for peace with Pakistan is diplomacy and dialogue.

Reality: There may be a lot of people in Pakistan who are friendly towards India but not one of them has a say in Pakistan's policy towards India. Pakistan is run by the armed forces, ISI, the extremist mullahs and a bunch of floundering Zardari-type, Johnny-cum-lately politicians, all of whom hate India's stability, secularism, prosperity and unity. While diplomacy and dialogue has a place

Pranab Mukherjee

ANAB MUKHERJEE

in the rest of the world, it has utterly failed with Pakistan (witness flawed "peace process" of the last 60 years), because Pakistani leaders have always considered India's peace initiatives as a sign of weakness. The focus of our policy should be coercive diplomacy, with "all options are on the table" approach to strengthen and give a backbone to any future initiatives. Dialogue can only succeed if it is proposed from a position of unquestioned strength and power.

MYTH NO. 4

Pakistani government leaders are a bunch of nice, innocent guys, who are unaware of terrorism, infiltration and sabotage on Indian territory from Pakistani territory.

Reality: Pakistani government, armed forces, ISI, etc, are hand-in-glove with terror organizations comfortably settled in Pakistani territory and support and fund their terrorist activities against India. Please do not fall for its civilian government's feigned innocence nor for the appeals for restraint by Pakistani supporters in the West.

MYTH NO. 5

India can have cosy diplomatic relations with Pakistan and exchange of visits by civil society, while expecting other countries such as the US to put pressure on Pakistan to behave.

Reality: No country in the world is willing to spoil its relations with Pakistan as long as Indian leaders and diplomats regularly sit with Pakistani counterparts for tea and cashew nuts. If India is serious about providing security to its own people, the government has to take the lead in ostracising the terrorist state of Pakistan before it can expect others in the rest of the world to do so.

MYTH NO. 6

A soft and friendly policy towards Pakistan will gain Muslim votes.

Reality: Indian Muslims want to live in peace and security, and participate in India's prosperity as much as Indians of other persuasions. Strong, coercive and effective policy towards Pakistan, which will guarantee safety and security for all Indians, including Muslims, is the best way to gain their support in elections.

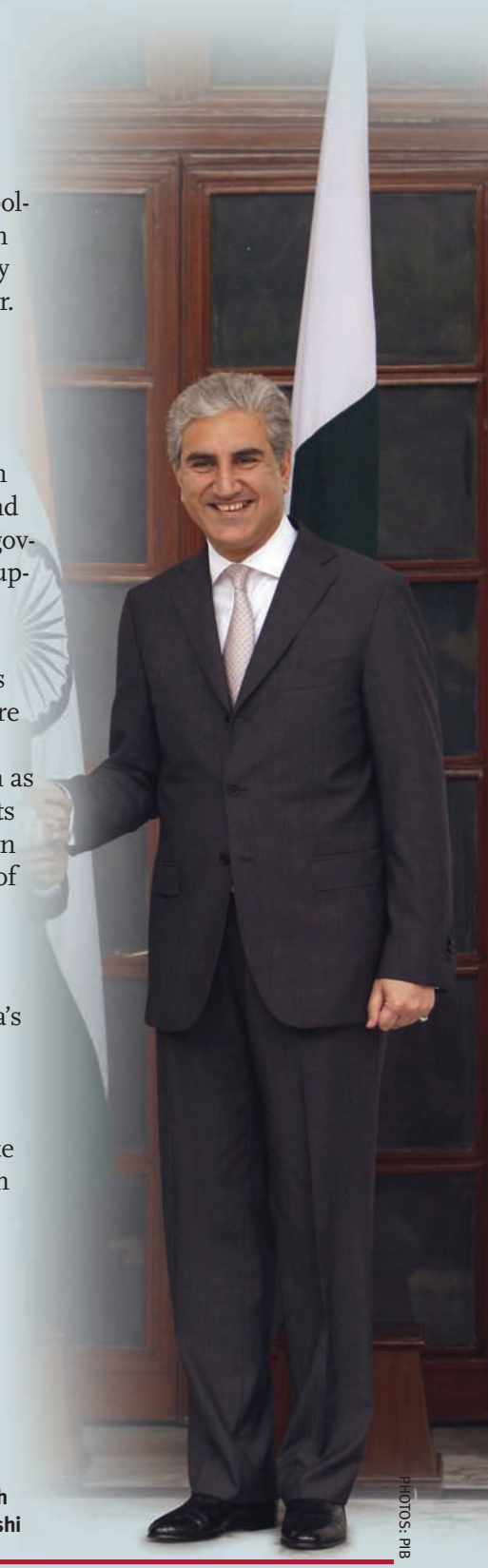
I have, no doubt, Mr Minister, that my extremely capable ex-Foreign Service colleagues are giving you correct advice on similar lines. What I am saying in this letter will hopefully complement and add to their advice to the Government.

With respectful regards,

Yours sincerely,

Prakash Shah

The writer was Permanent Representative of India to the UN and Ambassador to the UN Conference on Disarmament



Makhdoom Shah Mahmood Qureshi

PHOTOS: PIB

CHINKS IN THE ARMOUR

Intelligence, police, NSG need to be integrated into a central grid

by Col R Hariharan

THE barbaric terrorist raids in Mumbai, when a small number of *jehadi* terrorists held the city to ransom for three days and killed nearly 200 people, has exposed a number of chinks in our counterterrorism machinery. Its weaknesses in almost all avenues of the counterterrorism process were laid bare. These range from evolving a concept to acquire information to executing an action plan based upon processed intelligence. And the failure involved almost all stakeholders.

Undoubtedly, intelligence failure was one of the main causes for the poor performance of the government. But it would be shortsighted to make a scapegoat of intelligence agencies for it. In combating terrorism, intelligence is everyone's business. Of course, gathering specific information relating to terrorist activities at home and abroad and processing it into assessed intelligence for action is the primary responsibility of the Intelligence Bureau (IB), the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), and police anti-terrorist and intelligence bodies of states. They did not perform with the competency required for combating terrorism. But that is only part of it.

However, there are other important players in the national intelligence community like the intelligence echelons of the armed forces, the Border Security Force's intelligence wing, customs and revenue intelligence bodies, and the criminal intelligence setups at state level. These agencies have a large pool of specialists in their own spheres that could provide useful insights into terrorists and their activities. Such areas of relevance include terrorist techniques and weaponry, their sources of finance and money laundering channels used by them, trans-border and maritime smuggling routes available to terrorists, and *benami* transactions at home through which front organizations of terrorists in India are supported. This large intelligence resource is not fully tapped for the nuggets of unprocessed information they gather in their daily course of events seemingly unrelated to terrorist activities. There is no central clearing house for processing such information.

At present such information lies buried within the huge mass of information that flows through a myriad of these specialized

agencies. However, if put together, these bits of information can fill up important gaps in evolving a complete picture of terrorists' future course of action. Often this process comes to the fore only after the terrorist strike. For instance, in the case of the Mumbai attack, within a week useful pieces of information, no doubt unprocessed, surfaced from agencies other than national intelligence bodies. Most of them were already available with these agencies. For instance, UP police had recovered from a suspected Lashkar-e-Taibba (LeT) operative last year a sketch showing the targets of the Mumbai attack

It is now confirmed that both RAW and IB had given information on the LeT training its cadres for carrying out a sea-based raid on key targets in Mumbai well in advance

Mumbai police: only a cog in the wheel

with time and distance from the Mumbai jetties. This important bit of information was never followed up beyond including it in the chargesheet filed in a court in UP!

Such aberration results in inadequate or incomplete processing of information leading to incorrect response and dissipation of intelligence resources. This appears to be the biggest lacuna in our national approach to intelligence. With modern information technology-based tools available, large volumes of related information can easily be processed in real time. And, in a war against terror, the entire gamut of intelligence agencies and the police and security agencies, including specialized agencies like the National Security Guard, should be integrated on a common intelligence grid.

A second aspect is about "actionable intelligence". It is now confirmed that both RAW and IB had given information on the LeT training its cadres for carrying out a sea-based raid on key targets in Mumbai well in advance. In fact, the IB had forwarded the details of trainees, training schedule and trainers to Mumbai police as early as December 2006. And the Mumbai police had put on alert the hotels that were subsequently targeted. Later, they lifted the alert because the police felt the information was too generalized. The RAW information was sent to the Navy and the Coast Guard. Despite this, the naval chief said the information provided was not "actionable" while the police said it was too generalized.

The intelligence agencies, the police and the Navy are perhaps right in their own ways as their expectations were neither understood nor analysed by the intelligence providers. On the other hand, many stakeholders and media sections fail to understand that intelligence will never be complete or full. There is a need for the stakeholders to assess and follow up such information. Those who have to take action will have to evolve their own picture by fitting in bits and pieces of information that flow in with related information already available with them. This will assist in deciding their course of action. Evidently, this processing mechanism at the providers' and users' ends are not working with the seriousness and speed required to tackle the terrorist threat.

THERE is also the semantics of information. For the Navy, "actionable intelligence" has to point to a likely area in the vast oceans where the terrorists would be passing through. Generally, both RAW and IB think their job is over once they pass on the information to the users. It is important they interact with the users regularly to understand the grey areas and assist them in evolving a fuller understanding of the situation. Unfortunately, such a relationship does not exist now.

These are only a few of the fundamental problems waiting to be tackled. Mere cosmetic action like the resignation of non-effective ministers or sacking of intelligence chiefs will not improve the situation. Counterterrorism is a serious business in which intelligence plays only one part. Zero tolerance towards terrorism, public involvement in security planning, making up the deficiencies in the security infrastructure, and accountability at all levels are some of the other imperatives for a successful war against terror. Otherwise, the federal agency proposed to be created will be yet another bureaucratic behemoth that is too bloated to be effective. g

The writer is a Military Intelligence specialist with the South Asia Analysis Group

Cosmetic action like the resignation of non-effective ministers or sacking of intelligence chiefs will not improve the situation. Counterterrorism is a serious business in which intelligence plays only one part

Real-time

The commando force needs advanced mobility and lethality with superior tactics and techniques

by RV Sharada Prasad

JUST as the entire nation was showering adulation on the National Security Guards, they came in for harsh criticism from former Director General of the Punjab Police KPS Gill, who ended militant activities in Punjab.

Widely hailed for leading Operation Black Thunder, carried out by the NSG at the Golden Temple in Amritsar in May 1988, Gill said: "I am deeply ashamed of the role of the NSG. The operation to free the Taj hotel lasted for over 60 hours, and still the commandos failed to nab any of the terrorists alive. The shoddy conduct of the operations to ferret out a handful of terrorists ensconced in built-up areas had taken too long a time, and had failed to prevent the casualties of hostages."

Gill contrasted the Mumbai operations with Black Thunder: "I am reminded of Operation Black Thunder, which was a very successful NSG operation under me at the Golden Temple. The terrorists surrendered and not a single life was lost."

However, Sarabdeep Singh Virk, currently Director General of Police in Maharashtra, who had been seriously injured in Black Thunder, had this to say about the Mumbai operations: "There was absolutely no way in which we could have assessed the capacity of the terrorists. Nobody was ready for such a sustained operation by a suicide squad."

Indeed, the major difference between Black Thunder and the Taj and Oberoi operations was the amount of preparation. Gill, Virk, and MK Narayanan (then Director of the Intelligence Bureau) had years to prepare for Black Thunder after Blue Star in 1984 and another small operation in 1986. Moreover, they had detailed maps of the Golden Temple, and were able to formulate a three-stage plan – 1) Clear the Serai building; 2) Then enter the langar and clear it, and 3) Then attack the

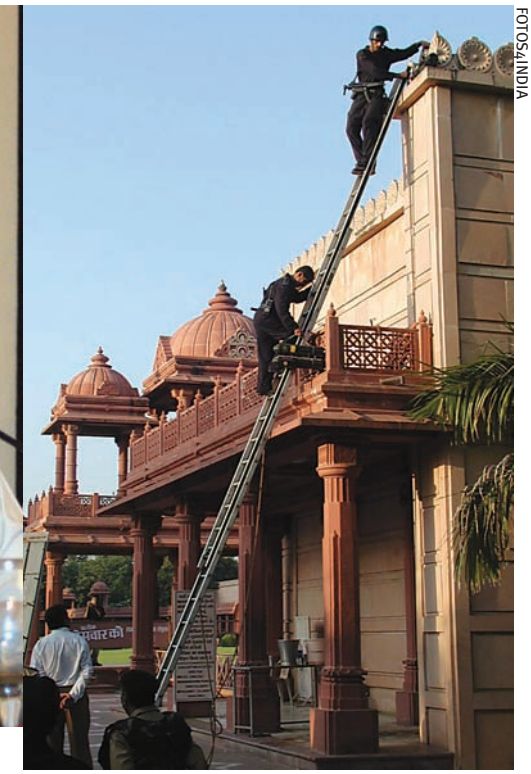
SHARAD SAXENA

KPS Gill: 'I am deeply ashamed'; (right) Akshardham: lessons for success

Procedures for Military Operations on Urbanized Terrain

- Helicopter assaults are vulnerable to shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles and rocket-propelled grenades.
- Artillery and air-to-ground shells fall at too shallow an angle to be effective in densely built-up areas.
- It is preferable to attack at night since terrorists do not usually possess night vision equipment.
- Streets and open spaces between buildings are killing zones. Use smoke cover when moving through these areas.
- Avoid windows, doors, and hallways.
- Deciding where to enter a building is critical. The rule of thumb is to enter at the highest floor possible to minimize the amount of upstairs fighting and to avoid enemy heavy-weapons positions, which will usually be located on lower floors.
- Avoid entering through doors and windows because they are usually covered by sniper fire or boobytrapped. It is preferable to breach walls by explosives, and then enter.
- Once inside the building, the first task is to cover with automatic weapons the staircases leading to upper floors and the basement; and, second, to seize rooms that overlook approaches to the building.
- Avoid, unless absolutely necessary, throwing grenades at upper windows or upstairs; they may bounce back.
- Frequently, stairways will be boobytrapped. Stairs are usually covered by enemy fire, and defenders can throw grenades into the stairwell. Avoid stairways whenever possible. Select rooms that have ceilings intact and place an explosive charge against the ceiling. The resultant explosion should kill or stun defenders and provide access to the next floor.
- When entering a room do not open doors by hand or attempt to kick them open. Shoot the door open by firing several rounds through the lock or blow the door in with explosives. Throw a hand grenade into the room. After detonation, one man should quickly enter, spray the room with automatic fire, and take up a position from where he can observe the entire room. A second man should then conduct a systematic search.

LESSONS



FOTOS4INDIA

THE URBAN WARFIGHTER OF 2025

Colonel Robert F Hahn, director of the US Army's Urban Warfare projects, listed the futuristic technologies that have to be developed and provided to the US Urban Warfighter Corps by 2025:

1. C4ISR: "The Urban Warfighter of 2025 should be provided with comprehensive situational awareness capabilities, easy-to-use integrated communications and navigational systems that can provide him real-time updates, the capabilities to connect with and employ a wide variety of robotic systems, unmanned aerial vehicles, and other sensor systems to determine who or what is in the buildings or streets around him – day or night. He needs to be able to communicate and see through walls."

2. Lethality: "The Urban Warfighter of 2025 must possess precision lethal fire assault weapons, and should be able to access digital, voice-activated fires from a variety of robotic systems operating semi-autonomously...He also must have direct access to precision fire support from distant platforms."

3. Mobility: "The Urban Warfighter of 2025 will require enhanced individual mobility in both the horizontal and vertical dimensions." (US defence researchers are already working on developing unmanned ground vehicles, individual aerial assault systems, and a Vertical Assault Urban Light Transporter that will give a soldier the ability to leap to the top of a four-storey building.)

4. Survivability: "By 2025, uniforms themselves must guarantee Survival. Uniforms must be light, offer protection from bullets, chemical-biological agents, cold, and heat; they must also provide low signature and chameleon camouflage."

5. Sustainability: "The Urban Warfighter of 2025 needs to carry lighter and more concentrated rations, and individual water purification kits, enabling him to subsist for at least a week."

Indeed, the major difference between Black Thunder and the Taj and Oberoi operations was the amount of preparation

Khalistani terrorists holed up in the sanctum sanctorum. They were also able to formulate an exit plan.

In contrast, the NSG did not have time to plan for the Taj and Oberoi attacks. In fact, the NSG has claimed that they were not provided detailed layout maps of the Taj hotel. It is shocking that the management of the Taj could not provide its layout maps promptly. In fact, one of the key factors for the outstanding success of the NSG during the Akshardham siege in September 2002 was that the priests of the Swaminarayan temple were able to immediately provide the NSG with detailed layout maps and telecommunication facilities.

The Indian Army's expertise in urban warfare has been hailed all over the world for handling more incidents than Britain's Special Air Services or the US' Berets. Over 1,500 foreign soldiers from 26 countries have been trained at the Counter Insurgency & Jungle Warfare School (CIJWS) at Vairengte in Mizoram. In July of this year, 30 US soldiers underwent a three-week training programme in low-intensity guerrilla warfare at the CIJWS. The US soldiers shared their experiences in tackling urban terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan, while the Indians passed on the tactics used in Jammu and Kashmir, and the Northeast. Earlier, in 2003, 100 US commandos had completed a three-week anti-insurgency combat training course at CIJWS.

While the Indian Army's Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (TTPs) for dealing with urban terrorism are among the best in the world, it can learn from the US in developing equipment and technologies for the urban warfighter *(see box)*.

The Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO) should immediately develop new technologies specifically suited to Indian urban warfare conditions, as well as strong, flexible, light-weight body armour; acoustic sniper detection devices; and optical equipment that will allow commandos to look around corners. g

The writer heads a group on C4ISRT (Command, Control, Communications and Computers Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance and Targeting) in South Asia

NOTHING NOTHING

The entire system is riddled with avoidable systemic failures

by VIJAY SANGHVI

ANARCHY has knocked at India's doors for some years now. But citizens were awakened only when a band of young terrorists on a suicide mission from Pakistan held Mumbai at gunpoint for over 50 hours, took 200 lives, and, more than that, exposed the hollowness of the system of governance. More than the deaths, what they exposed was much more harrowing for the Indian middle class – whose outbursts, condemnation of politicians, protests against politicians seeking to gain votes even from the tragedy, and peace marches were all symptoms of panic.

The Mumbai outrage has proved beyond doubt the main preoccupation of politicians of all brands and hues. Their overwhelming desire for power does spur them to use the administration but only for self-interest and not for serving the people who elect them to office. Bureaucrats function without any commitment to their oath or office. The lower rungs are corroded by the malaise of corruption. Law enforcement agencies do not function with cohesive and coordinated tune and tone. Civic bodies only attend to the needs of the rich.

The economy is open to manipulation by foreign capital coming for investment in either the property market or secondary markets with the sole purpose of profit and escape. The foreign capital does not augment the growth of the Indian economy by setting up units of production but only mops up life's savings of middle class investors. The Finance Minister kept assuring that the global recession would not affect the Indian economy because of its sound fundamentals, while doing nothing to keep foreign capital from taking away profits mopped up from the middle classes' losses. Everyone now has to pay more for survival while life's savings are wiped out by the falling markets and recession.

India has faced terrorism longer than other countries. Opportunities were available to learn lessons and evolve an effective system of fighting terrorism. Yet terrorists march in at will, strike as they want and walk away either through escape or death, leaving the system clueless about their objectives, masterminds, motivators, sources of resources and supplies, trainers and local guardians and agents.

The Marriot Hotel was blown up in Pakistan by terrorists in 2007. It ought to have set alarm bells ringing for our Home Minister and all officials connected with internal security. They ought to have immediately set up a team to prepare a blueprint for securing Indian hotels that could be targets. Was any such team created to work out details as well as to identify other areas that could be targets or identify routes that could provide easy access for terrorist groups from outside?

All that followed the Mumbai outrage was a war among agencies to pass the buck. Secret memo notes were leaked to obliging mediapersons so as to expose how a warning was issued but no one took it seriously. Not even the agency that issued it. It did not ascertain that follow-up action was initiated by the concerned agencies. Its responsibility was over with the issue of the note.

There is a multiplicity of agencies for different tasks but their work overlaps in one respect. They are all related directly or indirectly to internal security affairs. However, there was no mechanism to coordinate cohesive functioning so that they can all contribute to fighting terrorism. Such a mechanism ought to have been created a decade ago. States oppose a federal agency to fight terrorism lest they lose their authority. And no one attends to a grim aspect – that terrorism cannot be treated like an ordinary crime, which the police tends to

The outburst of middle class anger came only after they saw the politicians moving in to bake their bread on the funeral pyres of brave men who had lost their lives in the line of duty

LEARNED, GAINED

Funeral of Karkare: no lessons from death of a hero?

do. Terrorism is born of a desire for domination of an idea, of a sect or ideology. It is unlike other crimes that revolve around greed for money, human passions and emotions. Those involved in terrorist strikes are motivated to the extent of seeking death in accomplishing the mission. Only an alert mind that can bring itself to think in the same way as the terrorist can anticipate the next move.

Traffic jams are the most vulnerable terrorist targets. But no one attends to the need for better traffic management or for educating young drivers through punitive measures to observe traffic rules. Vehicles are made to crawl during the evening rush hour as most police stations select this time to raise barriers for checks. Does anyone realize that this is offering a target to terrorists?

Delay is the least affordable luxury in fighting terrorism. Yet the NSG took nine hours to take their positions outside the Mumbai locations. Only after this gaffe has the need for locating NSG sub-units at other locations been realized.

India has faced terrorism longer than other countries. Opportunities were available to evolve an effective system of fighting terrorism. Yet terrorists march in at will, strike as they want and walk away

HOWEVER, the handling of the Mumbai attack also established conclusively that the system is capable of meeting challenges. Different agencies did work out cohesion and coordination at local levels. There are those who are still committed to their oath of office and perform their duties. Nine policemen, including three senior officials of the Maharashtra police, laid down their lives. The NSG lost an officer and a jawan. Their hands were tied not only by the task of saving hostages but also by the mindless live telecasting by the media who exposed their positions and moves. The media continued the live telecast on the plea that cable networks were blocked in the hotels. Did they not realize that the terrorists had satellite telephones and could get information from counterparts outside?

But these are only external indications of non-preparedness or non-application of mind. The Home Minister or his experts could not anticipate any change of pattern in the terrorist attacks.

The outburst of middle class anger came only after they saw the politicians moving in to bake their bread on the funeral pyres of brave men who had lost their lives in the line of duty. There was a race among them. Some carried cash to the heroes' homes and others rushed to express condolences to the families as if they knew them well. The politicians as a class failed to provide the lead in the fight against terrorism as they did not apply their minds to preparing the system for it. Instead, they fought over whether or not a stern law that can empower the police to detain anyone for long durations even on suspicion was needed or not. Is it their contention that the existence of such a law in the statute books will scare away terrorists? If so, God help us. g

Was Home Minister a convenient scapegoat?

If there is one agency that should bear the brunt of the blame, it is the NSA

by MG Devasahayam

THE 'Mumbai Massacre' evoked a paranoid response – media anchors hyperventilated and screamed for 'war on terror' and epicurean socialites demanded 'carpet bombing' of Pakistan and asked Indians to surrender their personal freedom and liberty to 'the State', threatening to lynch anyone opposing this!

Within 'the State' itself, a bizarre blame game, that acquired the form of a theatre of the absurd, was being played out with National Security Adviser MK Narayanan, the repository of all intelligence and security brief, at the epicentre. If at all there is one agency at whose steps the blame for this horrendous incident could be placed, it is the NSA. Yet this entity got away unscathed while the non-Home Minister, Shivraj Patil, became the fall guy.

The NSA gets reports regularly from the Director of the Intelligence Bureau, an officer handpicked by him, and the external intelligence agency, RAW. It is the NSA who decides what he should inform the PM and what he should hold back. Prioritizing and then guiding intelligence that concerns security and follow-up action are his mandated tasks. The failure to do so is manifest.

Now all the intelligence agencies are claiming that they had tipped off the PMO (read Narayanan) and other security groups, but no one moved. Even the US government is claiming that they had warned the Indian government of the possibility of a seaborne attack by terrorists, but no one paid heed. Statements are attributed to a senior IB official in which he says that all the intelligence was provided to the PMO and NSA, but there was no follow-up action.

The Statesman charged that under the serving NSA the country has reportedly lost about 6,500 lives in terrorist attacks and billions in asset damages. It concluded: "His track record establishes beyond any doubt that India is unsafe in his hands." The PMO should repudiate these serious and pointed charges.

It is learnt that after the 'Mumbai Massacre', the NSA was forced to tender his resignation. For a while, the national channels kept on "breaking news" that his resignation had been accepted. Intriguingly, shortly thereafter reports began streaming in that there was no basis to these reports.

Now to the National Security Guards, the creme-de-la-creme of India's commando force. From Day One of the euphoric 'recapture of Mumbai' by the NSG, I could sense something wrong somewhere. My enquiries revealed that NSG has five battalions, ie about 6,000 men. All personnel are on deputation from the Army, BSF, CRPF and ITBP for a full term of five years and not one is recruited directly. The force is commanded by an assortment of senior officers belonging to these services headed by an IPS officer of the rank of DGP. The original NSG Charter (1984) has a mandate for establishing two bases at Bombay and Madras of a batallion strength each. This mandate has not been acted upon.

What is appalling, about 20 per cent of the force is deployed for providing Z+ security to VVIPS. These 'elitist commandos', meant for crack anti-hijacking and anti-terror operations, are protecting and running errands for some of the most corrupt politicians and busybodies of India! Can it ever happen in a civilized country?

Taking a full 10 hours for 200 NSG commandos to arrive on the scene, while hundreds were being butchered by the terrorists, is gross inefficiency. This commando force used weapons and communication equipments that were inferior to that of the intruding terrorists!

With the core institution – the PMO – abdicating and the key instruments –NSA and NSG – decaying, the Indian 'State' is failing in the most fundamental of its duties: providing security to its citizens. In the event, vocal Mumbaikars have voted out the politician, bureaucrat and the police. A campaign for 'no security, no taxes' is being mooted! Former Attorney General of India Soli Sorabjee has filed a PIL in the Supreme Court on the 'failure of the State to protect its people' and the court has put the Central Government on notice!

Is Friedrich Engel's premonition of the State withering away coming true? Is it time we handed over 'the State' to hyperventilators, liberty-killers and 'Artists-against-Terror'? g

VIP security: a waste of top commandos

SHARAD SAXENA

These commandos, meant for crack anti-hijacking and anti-terror operations, are protecting and running errands for corrupt politicians and busybodies of India! Can it ever happen in a civilized country?

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TOUCHING EVERY INDIAN HOME

FOREIGN SPOOKS

Extreme caution is advisable when sharing

by RV Sharada Prasad

THE demand by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh that Pakistan send the Director General of its Inter Services Intelligence (later watered down by President Asif Ali Zardari under pressure from the Pakistan Army to mean a Director-level officer of ISI) has been opposed by a section of Indian intelligence officers who feel this would enable the ISI to gain knowledge of Indian tactics and procedures, and enable it to cover up its tracks.

After the Mumbai blasts of March 1993, both the US and China proposed a meeting between the chiefs of ISI and India's Research and Analysis Wing to settle RAW's allegations of ISI involvement. But then Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao rejected this proposal on the advice of intelligence officers who argued that the ISI would be able to find out what evidence the Indian police had been able to collect – and how – and then cover up its tracks.

While the visits to India of US Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte (who was the first head of the Directorate of National Intelligence) and current Director of US National Intelligence Mike McConnell are gratifying, India should keep in mind that US intelligence agencies are primarily interested in protecting their own interests. As soon as India ceases to serve their purposes, they will no longer take any interest in our welfare.

Indeed, cooperation between US and Indian intelligence agencies has gone through several ups and downs through the decades, and several old-time Indian intelligence officers are wary of relying too much on US intelligence agencies.

Indian and American intelligence agencies began cooperating in a limited way in the early 1950s on issues such as communist and secessionist activities in and around India. This intensified after the 1962 China War. US intelligence agencies had long been interested in the unstable and secession-prone Northeastern states for several reasons. In addition to pursuing their own agenda of destabilizing India while ostensibly cooperating to fight communism, from the early 1950s to the late 1970s they used the Northeastern region as a base for electronic and signal surveillance of the communist regimes of China, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. Their influence faded in the 1980s due to the degradation of their HUMINT (Human Intelligence) capabilities.

SHARAD SAXENA

Narayanan with Pakistan counterpart Durrani: handshake fraught with danger

India has had some unfortunate experiences with US intelligence agencies.

Immediately after the Mumbai explosions of March 1993, India sought the assistance of experts from Austrian and US agencies for examining hand grenades of Austrian origin and a chemical timer of US origin recovered from the blast sites.

The Austrian experts examined the grenades at the blast sites. Their government gave India a signed official report that these grenades had been manufactured in a Pakistani ordnance factory with technology and machine tools sold by an Austrian company to Pakistan's Defence Ministry. Austria also told India that it was free to use this report to build its evidence about the complicity of Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence in the Mumbai blasts.

But the US experts insisted that the chemical timer could be examined only in a particular specialized forensic laboratory

Indian intelligence officers feel (visit of ISI official) would enable the ISI to gain knowledge of Indian tactics and procedures, and enable it to cover up its tracks

ARE NOT FRIENDS

g information with outside intelligence agencies

LESSONS FROM KAO

The Indian government would do well to recall the guidelines which Ram Nath Kao, the founder of RAW, had formulated to govern cooperation with foreign intelligence agencies:

- Each and every instance of intelligence cooperation with a foreign country should be with the personal clearance of the Prime Minister, who should be kept constantly informed of all actions taken.
- All intelligence cooperation should be only through the Research and Analysis Wing, which would act as the nodal agency, maintain written records of all contacts with foreign intelligence agencies, and act as the interface between foreign intelligence agencies and Indian agencies needing their assistance.
- Foreign intelligence agencies should not be allowed to interact directly with any government department, agency or individual officer, bypassing RAW under the pretext of facilitating counterinsurgency or counterterrorism cooperation.

Following Kao's guidelines, RAW maintained detailed records of all interactions with foreign intelligence agencies in one secure location, periodically reviewed the usefulness of the intelligence cooperation, and kept the Prime Minister continually informed.

in the US. They repeatedly insisted that Indian forensic laboratories lacked the necessary technology and equipment. Indian intelligence officials became suspicious because the US claims were excessively vehement, and were therefore reluctant to cede possession of the timer. Then senior functionaries of the US government gave their personal word of honour to their counterparts in the Indian government that the timer would be returned intact to India after examination, whereupon India permitted them to take it.

After several weeks, they sent India an unsigned report which stated that the timer was indeed of US origin and was part of a consignment given by the US to Pakistan's ISI for being passed on to the Mujahideen during the anti-Soviet campaign in Afghanistan in the early 1980s. But the US specified that India should not use this unsigned report for any purpose.

India pointed out that this timer was the clinching incontrovertible evidence which it had long been seeking about ISI sponsorship of terrorism in India.

But the US officials retorted that there were widespread diversions or thefts of weapons from Pakistani Army arsenals to hundreds of arms dealers, and that Dawood Ibrahim and the other suspects in the Mumbai blasts "very probably obtained the timer from one of these hundreds of arms dealers without even one single ISI officer being aware of it".

WHEN the Indian officials asked the US officials to return the timer, the latter claimed that the timer had been "accidentally destroyed during testing by a young scientist".

Several Indian intelligence officials were of the view that this timer was not of Afghan war vintage of the early 1980s but was made around 1990-92, and would have exposed to India the close involvement of US agencies with ISI.

In sharp contrast to this experience with the US was that of the cooperation India received from the West German government when Dubai captured the Khalistani hijackers of an Indian Airlines flight. The revolvers recovered from the Khalistani hijackers were of West German origin. India and Dubai sent these revolvers to Germany for forensic examination. The German government provided India a signed report that these revolvers were part of a consignment which a West German company had sold to the Pakistani Army.

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Like the Austrians, the German government told India that it was free to use this report to build its evidence of ISI complicity in the Khalistan secessionist movement.

Soon after the timer incident of 1993, Indian intelligence officials, under the orders of then Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao, provided the US a detailed dossier of Pakistan's involvement in terrorism in Kashmir and Punjab. India had then wanted the US to notify Pakistan as a state sponsor of terrorism.

But the US officials refused to accept this dossier, stating that a large portion of the evidence collected by India was based on interrogation of captured militants: "We all know how your Indian police use torture to extract confessions."

After the embarrassment of the defection of the Joint Director of RAW, Ravinder Singh, to the US in 2004, another unhappy experience was the utilization of the Indo-US Cyber Security Forum, a subgroup of the Joint Indo-US Working Group on Terrorism, to penetrate the Indian government.

When the Indian officials asked the US officials to return the timer, the latter claimed that the timer had been 'accidentally destroyed during testing by a young scientist'

In the summer of 2006, Shib Shankar Paul, a systems analyst at the National Security Council Secretariat, his superior, Commander Mukesh Saini, and Brigadier (Retd) Ujjal Das Gupta, head of the computer section of RAW, were arrested under the Official Secrets Act, for allegedly passing on information to Rosanna Minchew, an American diplomat.

Minchew, a coordinator of the Indo-US Cyber Security Forum, was reportedly an intelligence officer under the diplomatic cover of third secretary in the US embassy in New Delhi. She left India in the summer of 2006. g

maritime threat

The coastal NIGHTMARE

Why Gujarat's huge coastline is vulnerable

by Yogesh Sharma

COASTAL security threat is a major issue that has been consistently ignored by the Gujarat government. Transportation of drugs, weapons and explosives through the sea route is common but the Mumbai terrorist attack has highlighted a dangerous aspect besides this commercial one. Gujarat has 41 ports, of which only Kandla is a major one. Even among these, only a dozen ports have activity – that too not round the year. Obviously, these ports are the biggest entry points for terrorists. Earlier, smugglers used this coastal passage. Now, terrorists have established that it is a safe passage for them also.

Lack of vigil along the coastline, and lax security at ports and landing points reflect the state of affairs. Security of the ports comes under the Gujarat Maritime Board. The state of security can be gauged from the fact that just one port, Magdulla, has International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS). The code has been fixed by the International Maritime Agency. The government has now decided to implement it in 10 ports.

The ISPS code is the minimum security requirement for ships, ports and government agencies. It is being implemented internationally since 2004. The Code prescribes responsibilities of governments, shipping companies, shipboard personnel, and port/facility personnel to "detect security threats and take preventive measures against security incidents affecting ships or port facilities used in international trade". Under the Code, the port's surveillance, peripheral fencing and ship-to-shore interface are covered.

According to Captain SC Mathur of the GMB, steps are being taken to strengthen security at the ports. Electric fencing with breach alarms is to be set up. This was decided at a recent meeting between the GMB, Navy and intelligence personnnel.

Gujarat does not have trained staff for coastal security. With Central government help, it has set up 10 marine police stations but the staff is drawn from the local police. In the past, there were proposals to induct the Gujarat Industrial Security Force or Central Industrial Security Force

Apart from Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT), Mumbai, no port in the country has proper mechanism to scan freight containers

at ports but no decision was ever taken. Following 26/11, Gujarat has mooted a fresh proposal to deploy the CISF.

Recently, the state Home department officials had a meeting with Central officials on the coastal security issue. The Centre has assured it will release more funds under the coastal security plan. According to a senior official of the state Home department, Gujarat has drawn up an elaborate security plan which consists of setting up 51 coastal police stations, 70 outposts and 90 watch towers. It has also assured it will provide 30 speedboats.

Earlier, Gujarat had bought boats with speeds of up to 6 nautical miles per hour whereas what was needed was speedboats of about 12 nautical miles per hour. When the audit department detected the blunder, the officers responsible said the job was hardly aggressive and that slower vessels would do!

A major security threat is posed by con-

Gujarat's maritime USP

The state, with its 1600-km coastline and ports, is a major maritime state but its entrepreneurs have made it excel in maritime trade. Much of the success is because of the port-based industries of Gujarat. Industrialists benefited from the liberal initiatives of the Government of India coupled with measures like port policies and infrastructural framework of the state government and set up captive jetties. Hence, 80 per cent of the income in the state is from captive jetties and not from the ports. The captive jetties have assured cargo handling for the needs of port-based industry.

Hajira is the only port in the country for handling LNG. Dahej handles liquid chemicals. Gujarat Chemical Port Terminal Co. Ltd has specialized facilities for handling and storage of gaseous and liquid chemicals of cryogenic and non-cryogenic types. It caters to the LNG needs of not only Gujarat but Rajasthan, MP, Maharasthra, Delhi and Punjab.

tainers. Apart from Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT), Mumbai, no port in the country has proper mechanism to scan containers. Thus, there is no check on material that is being transported. A majority of the containers coming to Gujarat transit through places like Dubai. There is every possibility of these containers being used to smuggle arms and explosives, and also for human trafficking as they are air-conditioned.

Gujarat is most vulnerable because of its location. It has two ports, Pipavav and Mundra, that handle freight containers. At present, both ports have random checks through hand-held scanners.

The high-tech scanning system, costing around Rs 50 crore, takes every container to the screening framework and brings it back. The containers pass through the scanning channel smoothly.

Gujarat also plans to introduce strict procedures for registration of fishing vessels in the smaller ports. "Although we register only trawlers and ships, we will also monitor the smaller boats in the state," said Captain Mathur.

In the past, the Gujarat coast has been used to smuggle in RDX and weapons. In 1993, Mamummiya (real name Umarmiya Panjumiya Bukhari) was caught with RDX and automatic weapons. The police has now picked up a man who is a master of navigating the safe secret sea route between India and Pakistan after the Mumbai incident. g

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Survival of the LEAST FIT

by VINOD KAPOOR

AS India watched the live telecast of the Mumbai terrorist attack, there was anger and condemnation of a kind the country has never witnessed. The nation is excoriating a degenerated system of absurdities, inequalities, overbearance and unaccountability perpetrated by a corrupt and inept political and bureaucratic system. Till four months back the armed forces and police were castigating the bad treatment meted out by the Sixth Pay Commission but the government turned a deaf ear. Now the same forces have salvaged the national honour. Because they are true professionals.

I learnt the meaning of the word "professional" during my schooldays, after seeing a Hollywood western *The Professionals*. The menacing looks of Lee Van Cleef and trigger-smart James Coburn, and the ease with which they accomplished their given task gave me an insight. The Macmillan Dictionary defines a professional as "one whose abilities or status as a professional is unquestionable or quite evident to conduct a task". In common parlance, he would be a person who is specialized for a particular job for which he has been trained.

India is now living in the new world order where its prowess to provide specialized knowledge has been widely recognized. It is indeed heartening to observe that academics, science, information technology, business management, medicine, engineering are domains the country has earned respect for. The gradual ascendancy in economy and spread of the knowledge industry is an outcome of the great interest our people have taken in different fields of specialization. The corporate sector too has spearheaded induction of specialized hands to meet new challenges.

But has the government accepted the change and diverted its focus to the professionals? Yes and no. While the think tank accepts the importance of and need for specialized inputs, bureaucratic supremacy refuses to yield the identified segments. The hegemony of the bureaucracy with deep-rooted tentacles has denied other more efficient nation-serving agencies their share of glory and power since the beginning. This tussle for professionals' rightful positioning in the changed scenario calls for concerted action.

SHARAD SAXENA

Millions of SMSs are circulating, advocating better conditions for the armed forces. They are indicative of the public mood which no government can ignore

Some time ago, the Standing Committee of Parliament for Culture said that the Archaeological Survey of India should have an expert as its DG and not a babu. The report lies unattended and bureaucrats continue to control the ASI. Despite India's strong credentials, over 785 scientists have quit in the last three years. DRDO is facing major attrition problems as resignations are pouring in regularly. Though the incentives in salary hikes in the Sixth Pay Commission have not stemmed the outflow, the reasons are much beyond this.

The real cause has been spelt out by Prof Hans Wigzell, Chairperson of the Nobel Prize Award Committee, in his statement that good scientists, like good cricket players, will be recruited by the best teams in the world. He adds that Indian scientists are a

frustrated lot and the "complex bureaucratic" control of science is resented! According to him, Chinese scientists will be strong contenders for Nobel prizes in 15 years because of support and freedom being given by their government.

The concern for nation and a strong will amongst politicians is not visible nor are they intellectually competent to tackle a bureaucrat. While they can pull illiterates around them, when it comes to actual deliverance, very few can perform. It was novel thinking on the part of Defence Minister George Fernandes when he sent bureaucrats to Siachen for 15 days to apprise them of the needs of the Army. And it worked!

The recent matter of appointment of the Director General of DGCA is interesting. While Principal Bench CAT, New Delhi supported the internal technocrat AK Chopra, ADG, the government (or bureaucracy) decided to stall it by moving the High Court. One fails to understand why a generalist, a mere "file pusher", would be keen on grabbing something he is not qualified for.

THIS rung many alarm bells but there's none to hear. The ineffectual state in which all professional and technical organizations are groping would have put any government or nation to shame. Recommendations of numerous Parliamentary Committees are gathering dust or else there would have been internal professionals manning important organizations like AIR and Doordarshan and restoring them to former glory.

It is sad that a government headed by a specialist economist has failed to uplift professionals, who are the backbone of the country's functioning. They still have to genuflect to the generalists.

Millions of SMSs are circulating, advocating better conditions for the armed forces. They are indicative of the public mood which no government can ignore. What happens if, next time around, the NSG or armed forces run out of their resolve owing to indifferent treatment or any other professional body refusing to yield? Bureaucracy is a giant mechanism operated by pygmies, said Balzac. As such, bureaucrats are known to delegate issues when in trouble or simply ponder when in charge. Let the professionals assert and perform. India will be a prettier picture then.

The writer is a television consultant

Shaping up a shake-up

Three years' discussions have yielded some praiseworthy proposals to improve the civil services, but will they be allowed to work?

by Prabhat Kumar

THE just-released Administrative Reforms Commission's tenth report outlines the panel's views on making bureaucracy more performance-driven and accountable, arrived at after three years of deliberations. Titled "Refurbishing of Personnel Administration", its focus *inter alia* is a comprehensive performance management system (PMS) for government employees.

While a full reading and digesting of the voluminous 377-page report will take some time (it is not yet available on the ARC website), debate on some salient features of the recommendations has already ensued in informed circles. A former Cabinet Secretary has instinctively welcomed the suggestion of "lowering the eligibility criteria" for recruitment at the initial stage. One fails to understand how "lowering the criteria" can result in improving the quality of the civil services. Perhaps the recommendation for lowering the maximum age limit for taking the Civil Services examination would at best render a slightly younger composition of probationers. It may be a point of view but I, for one, would not rate this recommendation as a "radical" one.

In fact, there is a reverse argument. Students who go through a professional course of study like engineering, medicine, law, management may be compelled to miss a couple of opportunities to take the examination if the maximum age limit for general candidates is reduced to 25. Besides, in the interest of greater professionalization/specialization of the civil services, it would be desirable to induct persons of promise and excellence at every level in government through some well-crafted test of merit.

The recommendation for introducing a formal degree course in public policy and management is most welcome

Instead of restricting the age profile of fresher recruits, the effort should be on picking the "right" material for manning the delivery of public services, which is the initial responsibility of young entrants into the civil services. We need young men and women with a sensitive and responsive attitude. We need persons who can feel the pain of the poor and deprived. We expect innovation in serving the citizen from these entrants.

The related recommendation for introducing a formal degree course in public policy and management is most welcome. Understanding public policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation is essential not only for those in administration but also for others who contribute to public agenda formation. Politicians would also be well advised to undergo such a programme.

SHARAD SAXENA

Speaker Chatterjee with IAS probationers

The Ecole Nationale d'Administration in France is one existing model for the proposed National Institute of Public Administration. There are others.

That the bureaucrats should be made accountable for their acts of commission and omission is unexceptionable. That they should be shown the door if they are unable to perform is an equally sound principle. The Moily Commission should be complimented for having suggested two intensive performance reviews and that those found unfit after 20 years should be denied further government service. The Commission should also be congratulated for suggesting a suitable provision in the imminent civil services legislation to limit the initial period of employment to 20 years.

However, any well-founded system can be made effective by honest enforcement. The extant system of performance appraisal could have delivered results provided everyone concerned – bureaucrats, politicians, social thinkers, mediapersons – had cooperated, unmindful of vested interests. Unfortunately, each one has tried to snatch self-interest from the system.

NO system – not even the proposed one, which I consider praiseworthy – will succeed if various stakeholders unscrupulously try to get around it. However foolproof the system may be, we Indians have a genius for finding ways to bypass it for our own narrow advantages. Corrupting systems seems to be our forte.

The solution lies, perhaps, in doing something about our national character. It may sound like philosophical rhetoric, but there's no denying the fact that societal values have been increasingly eroding over the decades. And no concerted effort has been made by our leaders to redeem national values.

Nevertheless, if the proposed measures for inculcating bureaucratic accountability are to have a salutary impact on administration, the bureaucracy needs to be made fairly independent of political control. Obviously, civil servants cannot be expected to function in corporate style without consideration of social and political realities, but a certain degree of freedom should be provided to bureaucrats. Accountability with hands tied at the back will be counterproductive. Accountability goes with freedom to make decisions and act on them.

Bimal Jalan says it is high time we introduce a separation within the Executive so that civil servants are directly responsible for their actions. Additionally, we need more specialization in public administration. The relative weight of specialists and generalists in government is currently lopsided. The structure of various services should be oriented towards specialization through recruitment, training and career planning. These two aspects demand urgent attention from the policymakers. g

The writer is a former Cabinet Secretary

Civil servants cannot be expected to function in corporate style without consideration of social and political realities, but a certain degree of freedom should be provided to bureaucrats. Accountability with hands tied at the back will be counterproductive

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Teacher in the

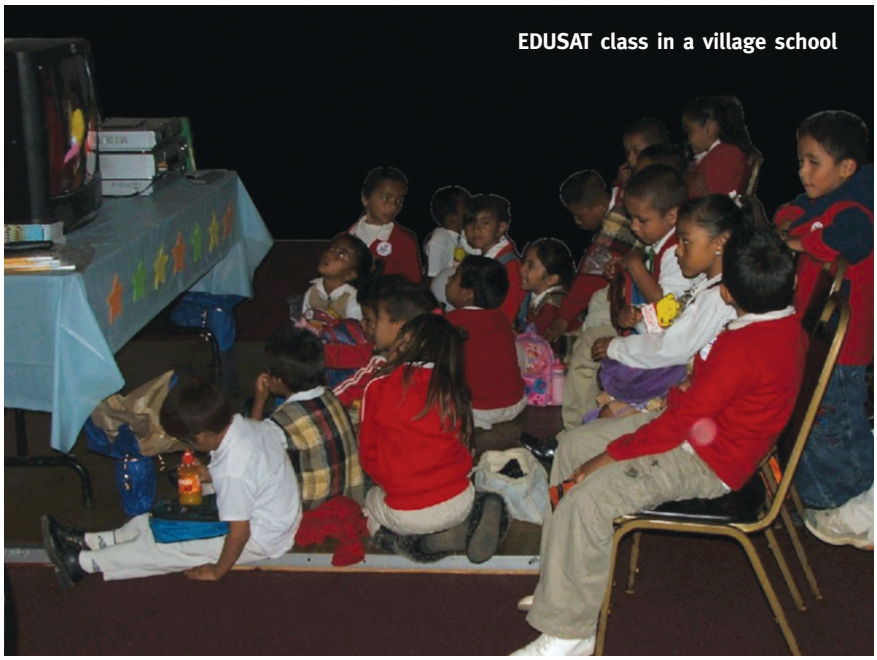
EDUSAT is an ideal channel to reach proper education to rural schools

EDUCATION, according to Paulo Freire, is conceived and practised as a form of "banking" in which the teacher as the communicator makes deposits that the students patiently receive, memorize and repeat. The latter, he believes, serves to increase the recipients' dependence on the educator. He thus counterposes a liberating approach in which education functions more as a dialogue whereby the educator learns as well as teaches and the student gains knowledge that is truly self-fulfilling.

Teaching in India's rural primary schools has quite often argued to be in the bind of such "banking education". In addition, since Independence, rural primary schools have faced formidable challenges of constraints like infrastructure, maintenance, teacher recruitment, curriculum capacity and training. The modest gains of Operation Blackboard and the National Education Policy in the late 1980s have undoubtedly been carried forward under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). Resultantly, enrolment has increased but critical issues of teacher absenteism, quality teaching and, more importantly, participation of marginalized girl children at the primary school stage continue to stare us in the face.

Interactive information and communication technologies were envisioned as one amongst other panaceas to overcome these limitations. After decade-long deliberations, in 2004, EDUSAT was launched by the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) in collaboration with the Ministry of Human Resource Development and the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) exclusively for the education sector.

EDUSAT (an acronym for Educational Satellite) has as many as 74 channels. It constitutes a technology network of uplink stations in selected national and state locations (to act as teaching ends) and downlink stations or facilities in various educational institutions (as learning ends) supported by satellite.



EDUSAT class in a village school

There is tremendous scope for reputed civil society and voluntary communication organizations to enter into public-private partnerships with gram panchayats

The classroom is ideally provided either with a 29-inch television, a camera and audio equipment, or a computer with an LCD projector. When a learner asks questions, the audio and visual signals get beamed to the satellite which in turn sends them to the teaching end. The network has the facility to record the lessons taught as well as questions asked and store the recording in digitized form to enable running of a virtual classroom. Lessons can thus be stored and retrieved by anyone with access to the computer. As a result, it is possible for a student to revisit and relive the classroom experience.

Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka have made pioneering efforts to generate a rich experience in use of virtual classrooms for capacity building in EDUSAT. Haryana initiated EDUSAT broadcasts on two channels (Science Senior Secondary Schools and College Channels) in 2006. In addition, in 2007, the state launched a full network comprising five channels and covering the entire gamut of education from primary to technical.

Interestingly, the Primary School Channel in Haryana – intended to cover 14.65 lakh children aged 6-14 in 9,080 schools – is a DTH (Direct to Home) receive-only terminal with 29-inch colour TVs. With the system having been installed

SKY

but lacunae still need ironing out

Primary steps forward

- The logic of "receive only terminal" at the primary school stage is not understandable. This is the stage when foundational ideas, impressions and the intellect of children, especially from rural areas, in the age group of 6-14 years, are nurtured for higher learning against socio-cultural odds. Thus, there is more need for interactive learning to build their capacities and to enable them to use these communication technologies effectively at the middle and secondary school stages.
- With a "receive only terminal" the role of the class teacher becomes critical. While the audio-visual image on television is a step better than repetitive teaching for rote, the class teacher's interaction with the taught in a dialogic mode is a must. Hence, with the project commencing in the primary school, the capacity of these teachers as communicators has to be enhanced in, at least, fortnightly orientation workshops at block or district level.
- A major constraint in the functioning of EDUSAT is frequent power cuts or failures. Hence the need to strengthen technical back-up for uninterrupted power supply. In the absence of the latter, classes cannot be held for days at a stretch – defeating the vision of interactive communication at the primary school stage. Often, the delayed response for such technical help comes from the equipment and service providers located at distant locations.
- EDUSAT classes need to be stringently monitored by the District Education Office both in terms of the daily dropout rate of girl children as also the impact on girl children of new workbooks that accompany the class modules. Such feedback studies need to be compiled and analysed in the fortnightly orientation workshops.
- It is extremely pertinent to devolve and decentralize the management, operation and ownership of EDUSAT at the primary school stage to the Constitutionally-backed third tier of rural local self-governance, ie the gram panchayats.

Interactive learning has no substitute in the case of both young and old

in about 5,000 primary schools, the curriculum aims at English and maths teaching for Classes I, II and V.

The primary school of Aminabad village in Punhana block of Mewat district is one such school located in the socio-economic ecology of backwardness, poverty and remoteness. It is largely inhabited by Meos – Hindus who converted to Islam in the 17th Century. My grassroots study of the EDUSAT project running in the Aminabad primary school highlights issues that could be addressed as policy interventions at a national level *(see box)*.

Second-generation reforms are currently underway to devolve three Fs (funds, functions and functionaries) to gram panchayats. There is, thus, tremendous scope for reputed civil society and voluntary communication organizations to enter into public-private partnerships with gram panchayats and also dovetail EDUSAT with other forms of community and multimedia communication. In the backdrop of the collaboration between ISRO, IGNOU and HRDM at the national level, such a partnership at the local level alone will ensure that the time lag in operational and managerial hiccups in running EDUSAT in rural primary schools is curtailed.

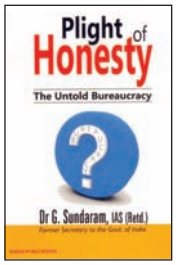
The network records the lessons taught and questions asked and stores it in digitized form

The vision, undoubtly, is quality interactive teaching at the grassroots level that enables rural primary schoolchildren to become citizens of tomorrow. g

g sundaram |

Serving many a

A retired IAS officer talks about his



Plight of Honesty: The Untold Bureaucracy
by Dr G Sundaram
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THROUGHOUT my life, I have been inspired by Mahatma Gandhi and his autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. A portrait of Mahatma Gandhi has always hung in my room.

I was born in a semi-agricultural family of Kilpattu village, old North Arcot district in Tamil Nadu and began academic life in a small school run by a single teacher. After post-graduation in economics from Madras University in 1958, I taught economics in Madras Christian College in 1959-60 and was selected for the Indian Police Service. In 1962, I cleared the IAS examination.

During the interview, where I was the last to be interviewed, Dr AN Jha, Director of the academy in Mussoorie, asked whether I had read Greek mythology and knew the story of Hercules, the last person to meet Cyclops, the giant who gobbled everyone. He asked whether I was aware that Cyclops told Hercules that he would gobble him up too! I recalled having seen a film in which Hercules killed Cyclops. So, before leaving the interview, I told them that, as the last person and as Hercules, I would perhaps survive after killing Cyclops. Apparently, this impressed them.

On another occasion, Dr Jha was attending a meeting of all Chief Ministers and state Ministers of Agriculture in his capacity as Lt-Governor of Delhi. After the inaugural session, Mrs Gandhi left and so did Dr Jha. I was there and followed Dr Jha out, talking to him. For some reason, Mrs Gandhi came back and enquired of Jha when passing him as to why he was leaving. He told her it was because he had been listening to the same things that were being said at the meeting for the past 20 years!

After my training, I started off as a Collector straightaway – which was perhaps unique in the country. In 1967, I joined as Collector of Pondicherry when MOH Farook was the Chief Minister. Once, when I entered his chamber, I saw a man sitting outside his room whom I did not recognize. Farook told me that he was a former Minister, Nagarajan, who was seeking a peon's job because he had nothing to live on. But Farook felt it was not proper to give a peon's post to an ex-Minister and gave him the post of a librarian. (What a contrast to the present-day MLAs or MPs, let alone Ministers!)

In 1970 I obtained an MPhil (License Special) in economics of integration from the University of Brussels. On return, I joined the Leather Export Promotion Council in Madras as Secretary under the Ministry of Commerce. TSR Subramanian from the Uttar Pradesh cadre, who later became Cabinet Secretary, was my predecessor. During my stint, a new leather policy was evolved that benefited a large number of people. In 2004, I was surprised to see Subramanian claiming the entire credit for the leather policy in his autobiography. When I was asked to introduce the book in the Madras Book Club in his presence, I told him on his face

Rajiv with defence chiefs: needless controversy over Bofors

that he had been back in UP when the policy was initiated by me and AC George and I faced the wrath of the semi-processed lobby. He had nothing to say. He had not imagined that I would be there to speak on the occasion. As Kennedy said, success has many claimants but failure is an orphan.

I also obtained a PhD from the Delhi School of Economics in 1977. My thesis was titled 'Commercial Policy of the EEC and the Association Agreements'. I was posted Counsellor in the Embassy of India and Mission to the EEC, Brussels, and accredited to the EEC, Belgium and Luxembourg for nearly three years (1979-81).

On 1.1.1982, I joined the Ministry of Defence. Many people may not know that the spadework for the Bofors negotiations was done by me. In fact, I held the first meeting of the negotiating committee after getting government approval under the chairmanship of the then Defence Secretary, SM Ghosh.

It was recorded in the JPC that Lt-Gen Sundarji gave a recommendation in favour of the Bofors gun on the basis of some "shoot and scoot" theory. Perhaps the politicians and the

We could have explained that we bought the Mirage from France, the Jaguar from the UK, the HDW from Germany and this gun from Sweden to please all of Europe

department at the wrong time

days as negotiator for the Bofors deal

Secretariat played a trick on him or he did it himself with an eye on a favour from Rajiv Gandhi. There was a rumour that Lt-Gen H Kaul might supersede him with the help of the Kashmiri lobby although this lobby became less powerful during Rajiv Gandhi's time. As a professional, he should have stated that both the French and Bofors guns would be equally acceptable to the Army depending upon the commercial advantage instead of giving an opinion in favour of one but placing the second one above as *inter se* seniority and inviting criticism upon himself.

Rajiv Gandhi became unnecessarily nervous when the controversy broke out. He was also not guided properly even by the civil service luminaries in his office like Gopi Arora. It was a fact that Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme was lobbying hard for the gun. He even flew down to Copenhagen to meet Mrs Gandhi when she was on her way to some international conference in the UK or US and spoke to her about the gun. This was indicated in a letter from C Garekhan, then in the PMO and later our Permanent Representative to the UN.

We could have explained that we bought the Mirage from France, the Jaguar from the UK, the HDW from Germany and this gun from Sweden to please all of Europe. The other gun, the trilaterally produced 155-mm one, was just not good enough. This crucial explanation was missing from Rajiv Gandhi's government. He was not guided properly.

The public does not know about civil service politicians (the second rung of politicians!) who are more dangerous than the professional politicians and who, of late, have sacrificed merit

In 1960, when I joined, and for long after that, corruption, particularly in the IAS, was unheard-of. But things have changed totally today. Corruption starts at the very top coupled with casteism, nepotism and favouritism. The political-bureaucrat-businessman nexus has become very close. While South Korea has imprisoned and indicted two former presidents for having built up private slush funds, in this country the tolerance for corruption is limitless and unashamed. Indeed, the suspects and the guilty are often coddled, to say nothing of being shielded. For instance, when a diligent Customs officer levied a penalty on the Minister for Textiles, Kamal Nath, for trying to bring in luxury goods without paying duty, it was the official who was summarily transferred. Nothing happened to the errant Minister.

MY senior colleague and good friend from the Gujarat cadre, N Vittal, as CVC made a lot of noise about corruption but did little to eradicate or even lessen it. During his tenure, Transparency International's corruption index for India became worse.

After a successful stint in Ministry of Defence, I took over as Chairman of the Gujarat Pollution Control Board. When the Chief Minister wanted to move me to sales tax for obvious reasons, Anil Agarwal brought this to the notice of the then Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, when he was asked to educate the MPs on pollution control and environmental problems. In fact, the idea of educating MPs was borrowed from me because, for the first time in the country, I had held an educative seminar for MLAs in Gujarat. I took over as Commissioner of Sales Tax on January 1, 1986. I was Secretary to the Government of India during 1993-96. I was the first to suggest introduction of VAT on the EEC pattern in 1986.

Looking back, I was in many departments at the wrong time. I had to popularize the institution of Collector in Pondicherry. I was in pollution control, environment, consumer affairs and tourism during the formative years of struggle. When these departments became popular, others jumped in and enjoyed the fruits. This also happened in Brussels.

The public is not conversant with the happenings, methods and machinations in government. They blame the politicians all the time which is all very well. But they do not know about the civil service politicians (the second rung of politicians!) who are more dangerous than the professional politicians and who, of late, have sacrificed merit for other considerations. Only brute political force or backing works now, not an honest and straightforward appeal.

But I have come a long way from Kilpattu so I have no regrets. I feel that I have served the public reasonably well. I will continue to do so in some form or other. There is no retirement for me. g

(Edited extract)

birthdays

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CADRE: HIMACHAL PRADESH
apsiddique@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

C Peter Ngahanyui
12-02-1952
CADRE: MANIPUR-TRIPURA
ngahanyui@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Aruna M Bahuguna
13-02-1957
CADRE: ANDHRA PRADESH
bahuguna@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

For the complete list, see www.indianbuzz.com

TRACKING

For a complete list of appointments & retirements, see www.indianbuzz.com

S JALAJA
The 1974-batch IAS officer of the Bihar cadre has become Secretary of AYUSH, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

UMAKANT MISHRA
The 1973-batch IIS officer has taken over as Principal Information officer.

GM SHRIVASTAVA
The 1972-batch IPS officer of the Assam cadre has been appointed Director General of Police of the state.

SOWMYA RAGHAVAN
The 1973-batch IRAS officer is now Financial Commissioner of Indian Railways.

RAMAN SRIVASTAVA
The 1973-batch IPS officer of the Kerala cadre has taken over as Special Secretary, Home, in the Government of India.

VIJAYALAKSHMY K GUPTA
The 1974-batch IDAS officer is now Additional Secretary, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India.

ANUP KUMAR PARASHAR
The 1974-batch IPS officer of the Manipur cadre has become Officer on Special Duty in the Home department of the state.

PIYUSH SRIVASTAVA
The 1993-batch IES officer has joined the Revenue Intelligence Bureau as Assistant Director General.

ARUN KUMAR MISHRA
The 1976-batch IAS officer of the Uttar Pradesh cadre has been appointed Adviser, Planning Commission.

C BALAKRISHNAN
The 1974-batch IAS officer of the Himachal Pradesh cadre is the new Secretary, Ministry of Coal.

SR RAO
The 1978-batch IAS officer of the Gujarat cadre is now Additional Secretary, Department of Information Technology in the Government of India.

A PATTANAYAK
The 1973-batch IPS officer of the Orissa cadre has been appointed Member of the State Administrative Tribunal in Orissa.

JACOB PUNNOOSE
The 1975-batch IPS officer of the Kerala cadre is now Director General of Police of the state.

RK GOEL
The 1977-batch IFS officer has joined the Ministry of Environment & Forests as Inspector General, External Aided Projects.

ALOK BHATNAGAR
The 1977-batch CSS officer has become Additional Secretary in the Central Vigilance Commission.

PD VAGHELA
The 1986-batch IAS officer of the Gujarat cadre is now Chairman, Kandla Port Trust.

ASHOK SAHU
The 1975-batch IES officer has become Economic Adviser in the Ministry of Labour & Employment.

DK PANDEY
The 1977-batch CSS officer has been appointed Joint Secretary in the Department of Official Languages.

SK PANDA
The 1980-batch IAS officer of the Tripura cadre has taken over as Secretary to the Chief Minister.

A GOPINATHAN
The 1977-batch IFS officer is now Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva.

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Moving On: ias and ips officers retiring in January 2009

ANDHRA PRADESH
Pradip K Agarwal (1975)

BIHAR
Jagannath Sharma (1993)

GUJARAT
VM Sonavane (1998)

HARYANA
HS Dhankhar (1989)

JHARKHAND
Arun Kumar Rath (1973)

KARNATAKA
Veena S Rao (1972)

KERALA
J Sudhakaran (1982)

MADHYA PRADESH
Arvind K Singh (1972)

MAHARASHTRA
J Sankaran (1972)

MANIPUR-TRIPURA
C Kipgen (1988)

RAJASTHAN
SK Mittal (1944)

UTTAR PRADESH
Ganga Ram Barua (1981)

WEST BENGAL
Bihari Lal Meena (1981)

ips

ANDHRA PRADESH
DT Naik (1979)

HARYANA
Resham Singh (1977)

JAMMU & KASHMIR
JA Makhdoomi (1986)

KARNATAKA
S Ramakrishna (1986)

GUJARAT
J Mahapatra (1974)

UTTAR PRADESH
CB Satpathy (1972)

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MARKETS MAY FINALLY BE BOTTOMING OUT

HOW will the year 2009 unfold? With the nightmarish memories of 2008 yet to fade away, every investor seems to be looking for an answer to this question. However, looking to the uncertainties surrounding the environment, it is extremely difficult for any analyst, including myself, to offer a straight answer. My mind and heart are constantly in a state of conflict. Whereas the heart says the worst seems to be over, the mind refuses to accept the same. And an almost 25 per cent steady rise in the markets has left everyone baffled.

A typical bear market rally is usually sharp and shortlived. But nothing of the sort is being witnessed in the current rally taking the markets past 10,000 – perhaps due to the compelling valuations. In contrast, the volumes have nothing to cheer about. However, there has been significant increase in retail participation coupled with good buying interest shown by FIIs – though their activity appears to be concentrated in the F&O segment. Such has been the upsurge that some of the stocks have witnessed 100 per cent gains over a short period of two-three weeks.

So, should I believe that the markets may not revisit the October lows – barring some profit booking off and on? If some astrological predictions are to be believed, the markets may see a level of as high as 15,000-16,000 by February-end. It is also said that an election-bound UPA government will do every trick to prop up the markets to a respectable level before announcing polls so that some of the gloom and pessimism of small investors can be mitigated.

There are plenty of other reasons to believe that the markets may be on the road to recovery for the bottom is reached when 10 out of 10 analysts as also everyone on the street turn bearish about the markets and actually stay away from them. Also, the markets are said to be bottoming out when they start ignoring successive bouts of negative news. Precisely this appears to have been happening in the last couple of weeks.

The government's announcement of a monetary and fiscal package is also likely to have a positive impact. The monetary measures are likely to release considerable liquidity in the system, allowing banks to lend at lower rates. The additional expenditure, largely directed towards infrastructure, should quicken the pace of investments while tax cuts should lead to reduction in prices and both together should stimulate demand. These measures combined with Pay Commission recommendations-based payouts should provide the necessary impetus.

A sharper than expected fall in inflation, and the likelihood of it falling further due to impact of cut in fuel prices is a welcome relief. What is more welcome is that food prices have also started coming down. Declining inflation gives much needed elbow room to stimulating measures especially when global commodity prices are softening. With FIIs selling abating and even the lowest estimates predicting a 6 per cent growth rate for India, eventually investors will have to allocate capital towards those economies where they see value appreciation over capital risk in Western countries. The near-zero target rates announced by the Federal Reserve and tempting Indian valuations, especially in sectors such as infrastructure, further strengthen the belief that the worst is over.

But the package announced by the government with more to follow can at best be termed as necessary but not a sufficient condition for reversing the downturn in the second half of the year, given that growth will most likely continue to decline until at least the first half of 2009. The Indian markets may therefore not stay buoyant and the current rally may end abruptly any moment. The extension of the current bear market rally may indeed set the stage for the next crash.

The Indian markets may therefore not stay buoyant and the current rally may end abruptly any moment. The extension of the current bear market rally may indeed set the stage for the next crash

The Index of Industrial Production was 0.4 per cent lower than it was a year ago. This is the first such decline since 1993. Exports also fell 12 per cent in October with a sharp fall recorded in auto sales as well. Though India is far less dependent on exports, such unexpected decline in industrial output suggests that domestic demand too is sharply shrinking. All this points to conditions of industrial recession in the country. With imports remaining high, the pressure on balance of payments can be immense in days to come.

The problems may get further compounded with the sharp slowdown in tax revenue, both direct and indirect. The December quarter may produce very dismal results for at least some of the sectors, including IT. Also, with the present fiscal in dire straits, there are hardly any options left with the present government. The international scenario is no different with the Federal Reserve announcing a near-zero rate policy. One wonders what other options are left with the world economies.

But, looking to the comparative position, the next correction can best be your last chance to pick good stocks for decent returns in two-three years' time. Wishing you a happy and prosperous 2009. g

The author has no exposure in the stock recommended in this column. gfiles does not accept responsibility for investment decisions by readers of this column. Investment-related queries may be sent to gfilesindia@gmail.com with Dr Sood's name in the subject line.

Attack cost IB chief dearly

HOME Minister Shivraj Patil's was not the only head to roll in the wake of the Mumbai terror attack. The axe has also fallen on the Director of the Intelligence Bureau, PC Halder – a 1970-batch IPS officer of the Bihar cadre – for the intelligence failure. However, though the government initially decided to remove him immediately, he has been allowed to continue till his retirement date of January 31, 2009. His successor has been announced: Rajiv Mathur, a 1972-batch IPS officer from the Uttar

ILLUSTRATIONS: ARUNA

Pradesh cadre.

The government was unhappy also with the input provided by Halder before the recently concluded Assembly polls in Rajasthan, Delhi, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh. Halder apparently predicted Congress victories in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, and defeat in Delhi and Rajasthan – the very opposite of what happened.

Most interesting is that the new Home Minister, P Chidambaram, went to Halder's room and asked him to virtually be idle and let Mathur handle all the work. Also, Halder's dream of being nominated Governor of a state after retirement now lies in shards.

Meanwhile, National Security Adviser MK Narayanan, a retired IPS officer of the 1958 batch, offered to resign. But the government did not want to lose an experienced officer (he has been Director, Intelligence Bureau twice, during 1989-1990 and again during 1991-1992). Besides, he is in Sonia Gandhi's good books. So he was asked to continue in the national interest.

Anti-terror Bill saves Gupta

THE move to dislodge Home Secretary Madhukar Gupta, a 1971-batch IAS officer from the Uttarakhand cadre, achieved momentum after the Mumbai attack. Many contenders stepped into the fray, including Commerce Secretary GK Pillai, Labour Secretary Sudha Pillai and Information & Broadcasting Secretary Sushma Singh.

But Gupta survived, bypassing all speculation.

Sources at North Block reveal that the Home Ministry had started drafting the anti-terror Bill much before the Mumbai incident and Gupta was the main architect. The attack merely paved the way for its tabling in Parliament. Once it becomes law, Gupta might be shifted to the Inter-State Council as Secretary.

Less crack commandos for VVIPs

THE Mumbai attack has achieved what public castigation could not. The government is seriously considering trimming the number

of commandos involved in VVIP security. Twenty per cent of the total strength of the National Security Guards (NSG), CRPF and local police is engaged in this unproductive task.

Enforcing that charity begins at home, Minister P Chidambaram has already curtailed his own security. The move is also aimed at pre-empting any political pressures from those who have for so long been the beneficiaries of such security.

It's just as well that Chidambaram has a reputation for being blunt and inaccessible to MPs and Ministers. The signal emanating from North Block is loud and clear – no going back on this decision.

Love among guns and chinars

ONE definite advantage that militancy has brought to Kashmir's separatist leaders is spouses from wealthy families. JKLF Chairman Yaseen Malik is engaged to Mushaal Hussein Mullick. The ring ceremony took place on October 24 in Islamabad. A student at the London School of Economics, Mushaal paints and also supports charities and NGOs working on gender issues.

Earlier, Aasiya Andrabi, chief of the Dukhtaran-e-Milliat (Daughters of the Nation), was the first to select a militant leader, Ashiq Hussain Fakhtoo, as her beau. After marriage, both were arrested. She spent two years in jail while Fakhtoo is serving a life term. The couple has a son.

Shabbir Shah, who used to be called the Nelson Mandela of Kashmir during detention, married Bilkeez – a doctor from Doda district. Shah's

aide, Nayeem Khan, married Hamida – a university lecturer of English. Most recently, in 2002, Sajjad Lone married JKLF chief Amanullah Khan's daughter, Asma, in Rawalpindi. Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, chief of the APHC's moderate faction, married American-born Kashmiri Sheeba Masoodi – publisher of a women's magazine in English that ran into controversy the day it was launched.

Interestingly, both Malik and Shah had said they were wedded to the "Kashmiri freedom movement" and would not marry until their goal was achieved. g

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